History Professor's Love For U.S. Leads to Book

By PAT YOUNG
MSU News Service

A Hungarian refugee "fell in love with the United States" in 1957 and that "love affair" has led to the publication of a book that has been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Dr. Gabor S. Boritt, assistant professor of history at Memphis State University and author of the book *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* said, "I fell in love with the United States. It's still a love affair."

Boritt was born in Budapest in 1940. A Freedom Fighter at age 16, he came to the U.S. with his family in 1957 to escape the Communists. Five years later, he became an American citizen.

"You must wait five years," Boritt said. "I would have been willing to become an American citizen in much less than five years."

He is reluctant to discuss his life in Hungary, but he did say, "I had a fine childhood. It may seem harsh by American standards. I'm sorry about Communism being forced on the place. No one wants it."

After arriving in the U.S., his family settled in South Dakota and he worked his way through Yankton College there by doing such jobs as cleaning barns, pitching hay and washing dishes.

He later received his master's degree from the University of South Dakota and his doctorate from Boston University in 1967.

He spent two years teaching history to American soldiers in Japan, Thailand and Taiwan. Later, he also taught Civil War history to GI's in Vietnam.

"My teaching in Vietnam was strictly voluntary," Boritt said. "Those guys needed something besides fighting. That was my way of saying 'thank you.' America has been good to me."

Boritt said he conceived the idea of the book because he wanted to do something for his adopted country and also because of his admiration for Lincoln.

"I did not just study Lincoln's economics — I studied Lincoln," he said. "I think he was an honest man in politics under most difficult circumstances. People who grew up in America have a preconceived notion of Lincoln. I grew up in utter ignorance (of him). That gives me insights (into Lincoln's character) that escape others. The book is about what Lincoln was all about."

Boritt's fascination with the Civil War led him to Memphis. "I'm a specialist on the Civil War. I wanted to work in the South."

The book was published by the University Press at Memphis State. It is the first time a book published by the MSU press has been submitted for the prize.

Nancy Hurley, assistant editor at MSU press, said, "The Pulitzer is a fairly general award and not just scholarly. This book is both general and scholarly interest."

Boritt is in the process of writing another book that "is well on the way." The tentative title of it is *Lincoln, Tennessee and The Civil War*. The book, he said, is being written especially for Memphis State as an expression of gratitude to the University.